

VA-ABC Radio Networks/Bob Kingsley Partnership

Department of Veterans Affairs
Central Office Building
Washington, DC

September 29, 2005

Scott Hogenson, VA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much for joining us this afternoon as we roll out a very important and unique veterans outreach effort by the Department of Veterans Affairs. I'm Scott Hogenson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs. I'll be your traffic cop for today's event, in which we rollout the new partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs, ABC Radio Networks and American Country Countdown with Bob Kingsley. This is an unprecedented outreach effort that will use the power of radio to reach out to millions of veterans and their family members, not only nation-wide, but world-wide. We'll be getting into more of those details as the afternoon and the presentation progresses.

I would like to now introduce, as part of my distinct pleasure in this job, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable R. James Nicholson.

Secretary Nicholson: Thank you, Scott. We were just talking about Scott's radio voice. We didn't say anything about your face being made for radio, we just talked about your voice. Once somebody said to me, "You have a face made for radio."

I want to welcome here to VA and our VA family, Bob and Nan Kingsley; John McConnell, the ABC Radio Network Senior Vice President; we have friends of ABC from Geico, Media Week, Billboard Radio Monitor, and R&R.

And a very special 'welcome back' to Boeing's Vice President of Communications, Maureen Cragin. Mrs. Cragin was the VA's Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs before she moved on to the high-rent district, if you will, across the river and we're glad to have her on board as well today.

To my many colleagues here from the VA, my greetings. And I am really pleased to be here today with a legend and this man is a country music legend. He's an Air Force veteran. Bob Kingsley, we are so privileged to have you here with us and to have you be participating in this great new outreach effort that we have embarked on.

Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs and ABC Radio Networks mark the beginning of a relationship, as Scott said, to reach out to America's veterans with the full power of the one of America's richest communications traditions: country music.

Country music has a rich tradition in American broadcasting. Eighty years have passed since WSM Radio first broadcast the WSM Barn Dance – the forerunner of the Grand

Ol' Opry, which came from Nashville's National Life and Accident Insurance Building in 1925. You remember that, Bob? It has since become the world's longest-running live radio program.

In 1930, just about the time the father of country music, Jimmie Rodgers, was topping the country music charts, President Hoover signed a bill creating the Veterans Administration. It was actually on July 21st of 1930 and we celebrated that 75th birthday here with quite a bit of pomp and ceremony at Constitution Hall on that day.

Today, as part of the VA's 75th anniversary, we are taking our message to the airwaves. Radio plays a key role in our outreach to veterans, and I'm delighted that ABC Radio Networks, *American Country Countdown* and Bob Kingsley have joined forces with the VA in our efforts to better inform veterans of their benefits.

As I told Bob - we had a meeting a few weeks ago, couple of weeks ago I think, in the Dallas area where they live with their beautiful cutting horses – that I used to own a ranch in southern Colorado and we'd drive down there on Saturday morning, often by myself, and I would always listen to *Country Countdown* to see what the charts were saying in country music as I was driving down there.

And to my mind, country music songs are somewhat like those cutting horses of yours. They're beautiful; they're not fancy horses; they're simple on the outside but smart on the inside. Country music, I think, has a wonderful message. You don't have to tell them what to do; and they don't put up with any baloney.

The history of country music radio stretches back to the years following World War One. In those days, the airwaves were filled with down-home melodies that reached the ears – and the hearts – of America's veterans who not long before, had been fighting in the Great War.

Those Doughboys had been through hell in Europe, and what they needed was a bit of heaven back home. And country music radio was there for them. From the days of the Great Depression, through World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Cold War, Desert Storm, and now the Global War on Terror, country music has held fast to the firm roots of God, home, family, community, and country.

It's poked fun at itself – and at us – it's been a reflecting pool, I think, for human emotions, and it's lifted America up when we needed a boost.

As we hear in the music and lyrics of Daryl Worley's "Have You Forgotten?" Toby Keith's "American Soldier," and Trace Adkins' "Arlington," country music recognizes and praises the sacrifices of our Nation's heroes in uniform.

Here at VA, we share many of the same emotional and patriotic feelings that flow so easily through country music.

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We care deeply for our men and women in uniform. We know who is responsible for our freedom. We know that freedom is not free and that our citizen-soldiers are paying the price every day.

We are pledged to honor their service to us with the best healthcare, benefits, and memorial tributes the world has ever known.

VA is proud to partner with ABC Radio Networks and Bob Kingsley to thank our veterans, and to encourage them to take full advantage of the resources that await them in our wonderful Medical Centers, our outpatient clinics, and our regional offices.

From Bob Kingsley's studio, VA and ABC Radio Networks will span America's country airwaves to let 25 million veterans know that they can turn to VA for the care and the benefits – and final tributes – that they earned through their selfless service.

I'm looking forward to a fruitful – and musical – partnership, and, once again, I commend you, Bob Kingsley and ABC Radio Networks, for joining with us to reach out to all our veterans with a heartfelt "thank you" and a warm, "come on by."

Thank you.

Hogenson: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I'd like now to introduce Mr. John McConnell, Senior Vice President of Programming for the ABC Radio Networks.

McConnell: Thank you and thank you for making us feel so at home today. As we walked into the building just a few minutes ago, we were greeted with somebody singing the jingle from *American Country Countdown* and I kind of liked that. In fact between your singing and (Scott Hogenson's) voice, I think we may found some new folks to be looking at for the program. Thank you for having us today. You all do extraordinary work and we are extremely proud to be here and to be able to work with you and partner with you.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Thank you, Scott, for all you have done. We very much appreciate it. The ABC Radio Networks – throughout the organization – has committed to this cause to help you, to help the administration, to help Bob get the word out to those that are in need and entitled to benefits that they just may not be aware of.

The sacrifices that have been made are such that everything that can be done, the information gotten to them and whatever it is that we can do, we are thrilled to be associated with you and to make sure that the message gets across.

The extraordinary thing about Bob – and there are many extraordinary things about him besides being an unbelievable and legendary broadcaster – is his ability to move people to get things done. I think you are going to find that you are pretty lucky to associated with him, as I have certainly found through all these years. Thank you.

Hogenson: Thank you, sir. I've never gotten to introduce anyone who I've listened to on the radio before, so this is kinda cool. Our next speaker got his start in Armed Forces Broadcasting – just like another fellow I know – he became the host of *American Country Countdown* in 1978 and over the years has racked up quite a record: 16 consecutive years as *Billboard Magazine's* Network Syndicated Program of the Year, Country Music Association National Broadcast Personality of the Year – twice, introduced into the Country DJ Hall of Fame. The list could go on and on, but I think you'd rather listen to the next man than me. Ladies and gentlemen, Bob Kingsley.

Kingsley: Thank you Scott, thank you Mr. Secretary for those kind words. John, thank you very much. I'm used o sitting in the studio all by myself and saying, "back it up" if I make a mistake.

I'm here today to help lend a hand to what we consider to be a real noble and important mission. It is, to state it very simply, to inform this country's veterans about the programs available to them. It's amazing to me how many do not know about e programs and the services available through the Veterans Administration. Our veterans have sacrificed a great deal, often risking their lives in our service and as a nation, one of the ways we express our gratitude is with government programs dealing with health, housing, insurance, education and many other benefits.

As I mentioned, way too many don't know about these programs and we are here to – hopefully – rectify that. I am a veteran; I've been involved in veterans programs over the years, especially since the first Gulf War, thanks to Mr. Bruce Nitsche.

I know the passion and dedication of those in the VA and they've inspired me to help them reach out to those who have served the nation. Along with the ABC Radio Networks, I and all of us at *American Country Countdown* want to thank our veterans and spread the word about the benefits available to them.

Now, one of the ways we'll be doing this is, I think we will begin on Veterans Day -- at this moment -- putting together a two-hour radio special I am hopeful will air on all our stations, which include over 420 stations and Armed Forces Radio, which I know is going to be carrying it. It will be carried here in Washington, DC on WMZQ. It's a two-hour program that really does cover many of the benefits.

Secretary Nicholson was good enough to come in and contribute many remarks that will be sprinkled throughout the show. As I mentioned, it is a two-hour show that is directed at the veterans, but hopefully produced in a way that everybody will find entertaining. And again those who live here in Washington, DC, will be able to hear it on WMZQ sometime over the (Veterans Day) weekend.

The object is to get this message out. To those of you in this room, to the national news media, to the entertainment media, and to veterans and their families everywhere, I ask that you help us in this endeavor and join us in our heartfelt appreciation for the men

and women who have served and who continue to serve this great nation. Any way you can do that at all, I thank you for that.

We are going to start shortly after the two-hour special kicks things off next month with PSAs, Public Service Announcements. I have recorded some, Secretary Nicholson has, and we plan to get as many country music stars involved and they will be lining up. I can promise you that.

I think we have a sample of what we will be broadcasting, not only on *American Country Countdown*, but on the ABC Radio Networks. So, if we could hear that. And, by the way, in this radio special – as I said, hopefully everybody will find it entertaining – there's wonderful, wonderful people involved in this: Toby Keith was pleased to be a part of it; Billy Ray Cyrus, who is still very, very involved. Trisha Yearwood, Sara Evans and many, many other high-profile country music stars; Brooks and Dunn, to me one of the highlights of the program is their telling of the story of the history behind *Yankee Doodle Dandee*. I think everybody will find that to be more than entertaining.

If we can hear a couple of those public service announcements.

Secretary Nicholson PSA Recording: Serving America's veterans is one of the most important and noble responsibilities of the nation. I'm Jim Nicholson, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. As the nation's chief advocate for America's veterans, I am proud that Bob Kingsley, *American Country Countdown* and ABC Radio have joined forces with the VA in an unprecedented campaign to inform veterans and their families about the benefits they've earned. To learn more, call 1-800-827-1000 or go online at va.gov

Bob Kingsley PSA Recording: Serving America's Veterans. I'm Bob Kingsley with news for U.S. military veterans and their families. Want to accelerate your career? The Department of Veterans Affairs provides education benefits to help veterans advance their career potential. Benefits can be used for degree and certificate programs, flight instruction, on-the-job training and more. Call VA at 1-888-GIBILL1 or visit online at va.gov
A message from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Serving America's Veterans.

Kingsley: The thing about these is that's going to be wonderful is that – probably a lot of you know that public service announcements, for the most part, come on at about 3:45 in the morning. Unfortunately, it's true. But these, I know they'll be on the program which airs most places on Sunday morning and ABC has committed to running them during prime time. So, I think we are off to a great start and we really appreciate any help that you all can give us. Thank you so much.

End of program